

Coroner warns of 'fake sites' pushing pills

Preliminary results suggest 57-year-old was poisoned

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The public is being warned about the dangers of purchasing medicine on the Internet following the death of Quadra Island resident Marcia Bergeron.

The 57-year-old apparently died of poisoning after purchasing pills through an online source, said Vancouver Island regional coroner Rose Stanton.

A toxicology report showed that Bergeron's anti-anxiety medication and sedative were laced with dangerous mineral traces, Stanton said.

"The pills had traces of uranium, strontium, selenium, aluminum, arsenic, barium and boron," said Stanton.

"People should talk to their pharmacist or their physician. They should try to verify the site before they purchase.

"If the drugs come with no identifying marks, names or instructions, they should be very suspicious."

Bergeron's medications, confiscated by the coroner, were generic pills in plastic bags with nothing to identify them. There was no information about proper dosage, and no printed materials.

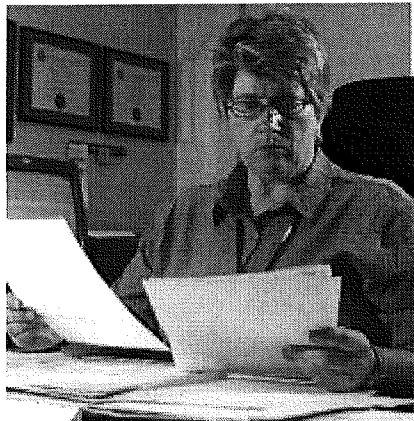
"There's no drug name, there's no dosage information -- that's dangerous," said Stanton. "I think the risk is very high that someone else could suffer the same fate."

Stanton said that the website Bergeron used had fake endorsements from medical agencies.

"These fake sites look very realistic," Stanton said. "They would fool a lot of people. And they mention the names of organization and companies that don't exist."

Stanton said the fake sites set up for very short periods of time -- often just a few days -- then shut down to avoid the authorities, and often set up again under a different name.

Bergeron, 57, was a U.S. citizen who spent part of the year on Quadra.



CREDIT: Ray Smith/CanWest News Service

Coroner Rose Stanton

Stanton said she had suffered from hair loss and vision loss -- two side-effects of poisoning -- in the three weeks between her pill purchase and her death in late December.

The toxicology report has only recently been completed linking her death to the online pill purchase.

Marnie Mitchell, CEO of the B.C. Pharmacy Association, stressed the merits of visiting local pharmacies in person.

"It's a tragic situation, and it really points to the importance of having a relationship with your community pharmacist," said Mitchell.

"It's a very dangerous situation. People need to know that they are dealing with trained medical professionals."

Marshall Moleschi, registrar of the College of Pharmacists of B.C., said legitimate, registered Internet pharmacies must follow strict rules.

"On their home page, a licensed pharmacist must have the name of the College of Pharmacists and our contact information," said Moleschi. "The home page also must have the telephone number and location of the pharmacy, as well as the name of a manager who can be contacted."

Moleschi said those interested in more information can visit the college's website at bcpharmacists.org.

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